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Managing the transition from the Millennium Development Goals to sustainable development goals: lessons learned for gender equality from the Millennium Development Goals and galvanizing transformative change

Chair's summary

1. On 19 March 2015, the Commission on the Status of Women convened an interactive panel discussion on the topic "Managing the transition from the Millennium Development Goals to sustainable development goals: lessons learned for gender equality from the Millennium Development Goals and galvanizing transformative change". The discussion was chaired by the Vice-Chair of the Commission (Sudan), Mohamed Elbahi, and was moderated by the Senior Research Fellow at the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development and former Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Magdalena Sepúlveda Carmona. The panellists were the following: former Professor of Public Policy at the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore and Adjunct Professor of Global Health and Population at Harvard University, Gita Sen; representative of Diverse Voices and Action for Equality, Fiji, and associate of Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era, Noelene Nabulivou; the President of the Centre d'études sur la justice et la résolution 1325, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Irène Esambo; and the Senior Coordinator, "United Nations Fit for Purpose" for the Post-2015 Development Agenda, John Hendra. Contributions to the discussion included statements by 17 representatives of Member States, a regional group and two civil society organizations. The Assistant Secretary-General/Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, Lakshmi Puri, provided closing remarks.

2. Participants focused on the lessons learned from the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals from a gender perspective and identified priorities

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for ensuring the effective implementation of the future sustainable development goals for women and girls.

Gender equality as a central priority for the sustainable development goals

3. There was widespread confirmation that gender equality, the empowerment of women and the human rights of women and girls should be a central priority in the future sustainable development goals. Participants agreed that there was a need for a stand-alone goal on gender equality that expanded on the areas covered by the Millennium Development Goals. In that respect, many participants highlighted the importance of completing the unfinished business of the Goals, with reference to areas such as maternal mortality, access to family planning, women's political participation, water and sanitation, poverty eradication, access to decent work and high-quality education for all. Looking ahead, there was support for a more comprehensive approach to gender equality in the sustainable development goals, as reflected in the fifth goal proposed by the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls).

4. Participants emphasized that, to achieve sustainable development and human rights for all, all three dimensions (economic, social and environmental) of gender inequality must be addressed and that systematic gender mainstreaming through goals, targets and indicators was essential to ensuring the integration of a gender perspective more broadly.

5. Participants agreed that it was important in the future agenda to look beyond national averages to ensure that the goals and targets were implemented and monitored for women and girls who experienced multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.

6. Several participants highlighted that it was important for all human rights to be central to the implementation of the sustainable development goals. Specifically, the importance of aligning with and building on existing frameworks, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, was emphasized.

Stronger monitoring and accountability mechanisms as a priority

7. Participants emphasized that there was a need for stronger monitoring mechanisms and systems of accountability to ensure that global commitments pertaining to women and girls were realized in the post-2015 context. Particular emphasis was laid on mechanisms to ensure systematic gender mainstreaming throughout all policies and programmes. Examples of effective accountability systems and monitoring mechanisms included parliamentary reviews, peer-review mechanisms, interministerial task forces and robust systems of national reporting. Participants also recommended that human rights treaty bodies and mechanisms such as the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review should be used more effectively in monitoring efforts.

8. The view was expressed that a significant challenge to effectively monitoring progress towards gender equality, women's empowerment and ensuring the human rights of women and girls was the lack of high-quality, sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics. In that regard, it was suggested that there was a need for

investment to increase statistical capacity to measure and understand gender inequality in a comprehensive manner and to monitor progress and evaluate the implementation of all the sustainable development goals for women and girls. Disaggregation by multiple factors to monitor the progress of the most marginalized groups of women and girls was also mentioned.

9. Participants acknowledged the role of the United Nations system in supporting all countries to deliver on the sustainable development goals for women and girls and called upon the system to support national planning and reporting to implement the goals, in addition to the establishment of partnerships.

10. Participants confirmed the vital role of women's civil society organizations in raising gender-specific concerns and monitoring the implementation of policies and programmes. Several participants acknowledged that there was a need to increase the space, resources and support provided to such organizations.

Investment needed to match the ambition of the future agenda

11. The lack of resources for the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls was highlighted as a major obstacle to achieving the targets. Participants gave examples of insufficient resources being allocated to the implementation of gender equality laws, policies and national action plans and to national gender equality mechanisms. They also noted that scant resources had been allocated to sectors such as social protection, health, education and water and sanitation.

12. Increasing investment in gender equality was emphasized as an urgent priority for the effective implementation of the sustainable development goals. Participants agreed that the future agenda required national resource mobilization in order to increase allocations to gender equality throughout all sectors of national budgets, as well as increased official development assistance for gender equality. The importance of South-South cooperation was also highlighted.

13. Participants also raised a need to ensure greater alignment between macroeconomic policies and gender equality and sustainable development outcomes. They called for macroeconomic policies to expand fiscal space to increase investment in gender equality. Gender-responsive budgeting and planning was highlighted as an effective strategy for monitoring investment in gender equality and ensuring transparency.

Need for an enabling environment for gender equality

14. Participants emphasized that creating an enabling environment for gender equality needed to be a crucial priority if the sustainable development goals were to be effectively implemented for women and girls. They drew attention to the negative impacts of the recent financial crisis on the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls and stressed that there was a need to build a global economic architecture, including a fair and equitable international trade and financial regime, that would enable all countries to achieve gender equality and sustainable development outcomes. They stressed that gender perspectives should be integrated into future commitments around global partnerships, technology transfer and capacity-building.

15. Participants warned of the current and future challenges posed by climate change, in particular for the most marginalized women and girls. In that respect, several participants emphasized that it was important for the new climate agreement to address gender equality effectively. Ensuring the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social and environmental) in the implementation of the sustainable development goals was also highlighted as a priority.

16. The specific challenges of attaining the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls in countries affected by conflict were raised by participants. In that respect, they proposed that the implementation of the future sustainable development goals should be aligned with key global commitments on women and peace and security, such as Security Council resolution 1325 (2000).